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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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Forty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 476th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 7 October 1992, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. LANUS (Argentina)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

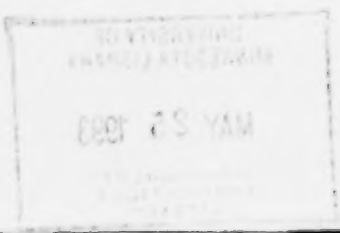
1. Mr. MHIRIBIDI (Zimbabwe) said his country was currently hosting 130,000 refugees, who were housed in five different camps. The majority of them were from Mozambique. In 1991, it had received some 10,000 Mozambicans, at the rate of 500 to 600 a month. Between January and June 1992, the rate had increased to 2,000 to 3,000 a month and, by August, had reached 6,500. Those displacements were the result of the conflicts now raging in Mozambique and of the drought that was affecting the whole of southern Africa. Unless food was delivered to the areas of Mozambique threatened by famine, there was a danger that 300,000 new refugees might arrive in Zimbabwe in the course of the next few weeks.

2. Zimbabwe welcomed the peace treaty signed in Rome between the warring parties in Mozambique, but could not but observe that peace had not yet made it possible to solve the enormous logistical problems which prevented food supplies from being taken to the areas where they were needed. In order to deal with that situation, Zimbabwe, conscious of its international obligations, was now in the process of establishing a sixth refugee camp in its territory. However, it should be noted that Zimbabwe too had suffered from the drought, which had been one of the worst in living memory. Accordingly, its capacity to host refugees had been reduced, since it needed to import foodstuffs to meet not only the needs of refugees, but also the needs of the local population. It therefore welcomed UNHCR's efforts to strengthen its emergency response capacity, which was likely to be put to the test in the area in the near future.

3. The concentration of refugees in certain areas had led to the degradation of the environment and enormous resources would have to be spent on rehabilitating it. UNHCR's concern for the environment gave reason to hope that measures would be taken to deal with that problem. In addition, Zimbabwe supported the idea of preventive action in the refugee field. In the specific case of the Mozambican refugees, such action could take the form of appealing to the international community to send food to keep the refugees where they now were, thereby satisfying humanitarian concerns and making economic sense.

4. Zimbabwe had made every effort to give high priority in its programmes to the needs of women and children, in conformity with the recommendations of the Executive Committee. Two persons had been appointed to act as mediators for women and children, even before UNHCR had appointed its own coordinators.

5. Voluntary repatriation to South Africa continued to be a matter of concern to Zimbabwe in view of that country's increasing instability and the wave of violence it was experiencing. At present, Zimbabwe was repatriating South Africans, on the one hand, and accepting refugees from southern Africa, on the other; it therefore urged UNHCR to intensify its protection efforts. The Government of Zimbabwe also noted that UNHCR had been supposed to end its



repatriation operations at the end of September. However, such operations would need to be continued in future on account of the large number of South Africans who would be in need of assistance.

6. Lastly, he expressed his concern at the outbreaks of xenophobia which had occurred in a number of asylum countries and strongly urged the international community to do everything it could to stop them.

7. Mrs. GALVIN (Colombia) pointed out that, if UNHCR was to fulfil its mandate, it would need to respond to demands that the international community had been unable to foresee. While the fall of the Berlin Wall had heralded a new era of freedom, it had also led to a number of disturbing events which had only heightened the concerns already aroused by developments in other regions: the views expressed by the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection were relevant in that connection. Of all of UNHCR's priorities, she would deal only with the questions of prevention and voluntary repatriation.

8. Where prevention was concerned, she felt obliged to point out that it was not entirely clear what action UNHCR was going to be able to take. However flexibly UNHCR's mandate was interpreted, it did not include the protection of human rights, the establishment of development models or the formulation of policies for preventing conflicts. In all those areas, UNHCR could offer its collaboration, but it had to stay strictly within its mandate and within the limits of humanitarian action. One useful prevention measure it could adopt was to publicize its activities and programmes, using its experience for teaching purposes. Any kind of humanitarian activity could form part of a prevention strategy if presented in a teaching context. In any event, although UNHCR was part of the international machinery for the elimination of sources of conflict, it would need to retain its own non-political character.

9. Voluntary repatriation was the durable solution par excellence. In that regard, the reports submitted to the Executive Committee and the introductory statement by the High Commissioner had quoted encouraging figures. They had also referred to reintegration programmes. In that connection, her delegation was concerned about the effect repatriation movements might have in developing countries. It might be asked how such countries could meet the additional needs created by the return and reintegration of persons who had been repatriated. If such needs were to be met without such countries being obliged to amend their development budgets and strategies, development models would need to be prepared in cooperation with intergovernmental bodies which were responsible for policy making and for programme funding and execution. She would therefore like to have more detailed information on the role of bodies such as UNDP, the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO and wished to know how they were working together to meet the needs created by the return of refugees.

10. Her delegation drew attention to the comprehensive plan for dealing with the refugee problem that had been established following the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) and which referred in

particular to the praiseworthy activities undertaken by receiving countries to apply the principles of international protection and to Mexico's programmes for refugee women and for the registration of children threatened with statelessness. The repatriation process was currently under way and it too had led to some exemplary programmes. Her delegation was nevertheless concerned about how such programmes were to be implemented. The High Commissioner had indicated in her statement that UNDP would be taking over the process the following spring. It might therefore be asked how the transition would take place, what role UNHCR would play in ensuring that the process did not lose its humanitarian character and by how much UNDP's budget for Central America would increase. It was true that UNDP had proved itself fully capable of meeting its considerable responsibilities in other regions, but it would be unfortunate if a programme which had been successful until now were to fail for lack of proper preparation in the last phase of its implementation.

11. Lastly, the Government of Colombia had been surprised to learn that, as a result of UNHCR's internal restructuring, the Latin America section had now become the Americas section. It would have liked to have been informed in advance of that decision. It hoped that the Latin American presence in UNHCR would remain the same as in the past, for it was a matter of regret that the Spanish language was heard less often in meetings and that Spanish documentation always arrived late. It was to be hoped that the lack of communication in recent months would be once more replaced by the fruitful dialogue which had always been a feature of Colombia's relations with UNHCR.

12. Mr. BOLANOS (Nicaragua), speaking as Chairman of the CIREFCA Follow-Up Committee, said that the participants in the Second International Meeting of the Committee, held in San Salvador in April 1992, had affirmed that the objectives of the countries of the region were the strengthening of peace, national reconciliation and democracy. They had also agreed that, in order to achieve those objectives, it was necessary to create economic and social conditions favourable to the reintegration of displaced persons by providing easier access to loans and by making health services, education, drinking water, housing and employment more freely available.

13. The peace accord that had been reached was a fragile one and there was a need to go beyond the stage of humanitarian assistance if the process now under way was to succeed in laying the foundations for a lasting peace. Participants in the meeting had also drawn attention to the importance of strengthening CIREFCA follow-up mechanisms.

14. After the San Salvador meeting, the countries of the region had met again in Managua, on 12 May, to ratify the Concerted Plan of Action and to reaffirm their intention of taking part in coordinating the activities of the UNHCR/UNDP Joint Support Unit. They had further reaffirmed that the High Commissioner should remain in charge of operations until such time as those repatriated had been completely integrated indicating that UNDP had to be more specific in its projects and improve its coordination with other agencies. In

their view, the activities of non-governmental organizations should complement those of Governments, in accordance with the communique issued following the Meeting of the Committee held in June 1991 in Honduras. The participants had also stated that they were confidently awaiting the financial contributions that had been pledged in San Salvador.

15. The results of the 12 May Meeting had been submitted to the UNHCR/UNDP Joint Support Unit, which had taken note of the concerns of the CIREFCA Follow-Up Committee and had indicated on 29 September, after consultation with donor countries, that donor interest in the region was clearly declining and that some donors had criticized projects they considered technically defective.

16. The countries of the region had wondered how it could be possible that, after three years, donor countries should be criticizing projects already under way, in view of the fact that such projects had been devised with technical support from UNHCR and UNDP and under the supervision of the Joint Support Unit. They had further agreed that contributions were inadequate and had called for a more rapid transfer of funds disbursed. One thing was certain - it was difficult to distinguish CIREFCA funds from UNHCR funds.

17. One country had been of the view that the support of the UNHCR/UNDP Joint Support Unit had been used mainly for the organization of the San Salvador meeting, which had not achieved any concrete results. All participants had agreed that funds received as bilateral development assistance should not be used to bring relief to populations displaced by an armed conflict. In addition, it had seemed contradictory to try to apply technical profit-and-loss criteria to funds intended for humanitarian purposes.

18. That was the attitude that currently prevailed in Central America as far as CIREFCA was concerned. If matters were to improve, the UNHCR/UNDP Joint Support Unit had to provide stronger support for the Governments of the region, so that donor aid could reach them more quickly and so that thought could be given to how to prepare for UNHCR's hand-over to UNDP, scheduled for June 1993. It was to be feared that the transition from one agency to another might leave a vacuum; if the international community really wished to apply the experience gained in Central America to other regions, it must act with the greatest possible caution. That was why the countries of the region wanted to participate directly in the Joint Support Unit's work, since it affected them first and foremost.

19. The CIREFCA process had proved a great success. He did not mean to belittle its merits, but did want to point out that the success had yet to be consolidated and that peace in the region was still fragile.

20. Mr. MOKBIL (Yemen) said that he deplored the tensions which prevailed in many countries and which were the root cause of human rights violations, which, in turn, forced peoples living under foreign occupation to apply for protection. That was the case in Bosnia and in the Palestinian occupied territories and he recalled that, on many occasions and in many different

forums, his country had emphasized the importance of according international protection to the Palestinian people. The people of Bosnia should also be protected and efforts should be made to solve the problems of the Somali people in Somalia itself. That meant that the United Nations and all countries in the world had to do their utmost to put out the fires raging in those regions so that their populations could be spared further tragedies and further uprooting from their homes.

21. Referring to the three components of the strategy formulated by the UNHCR's Working Group on International Protection, namely, emergency preparedness, voluntary repatriation and prevention, he noted that such measures would, as had been pointed out by the High Commissioner, require an international commitment if they were to be put into effect. Since it was undeniable that the influx of refugees was closely linked to human rights violations and to internal and regional conflicts, he proposed that, at its current session, the Executive Committee should adopt a text recommending that the question of refugees should be included as a separate item on the agenda of the World Conference on Human Rights. The Executive Committee could thus submit a draft resolution to the Conference establishing a link between full enjoyment of human rights and the refugee problem and referring to the three-pronged strategy recommended by the Working Group. That initiative would be the prelude to the organization of an international conference on refugees.

22. As a signatory to the 1951 Convention, Yemen had had no hesitation over the years, and, in particular, in the past two years, in taking in refugees from neighbouring States. It was now hosting 60,000 refugees, at a time when it was having to meet the high costs involved in the country's reunification, which had taken place in May 1990. In addition, Yemen had suffered considerable economic losses as a result of the Gulf war, which had led to the sudden return of nearly 1 million immigrants who had been living in neighbouring States. For two years, Yemen had had to cope with waves of refugees and had had to provide them, in cooperation with the High Commissioner's Office, with shelter, subsistence and health services until such time as UNHCR could build housing and install the necessary services on land allocated by the Government for that purpose.

23. In that connection, he commended the efforts made by UNHCR, as well as by other humanitarian bodies, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Yemeni Red Crescent and Médecins sans Frontières, to meet the basic needs of refugees in Yemen. His delegation also welcomed the spirit of cooperation which had characterized relations between the Government and UNHCR.

24. Mr. SAENZ CARRETE (Observer for Mexico) said that, as had been shown in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Somalia, the delivery of aid faced enormous obstacles despite its non-political and humanitarian character. Care should nevertheless be taken to ensure that the establishment of "safety zones" was not incompatible with the principles of the United Nations Charter.

25. The existence of a system of protection for persons uprooted following new outbreaks of unrest which destabilized world peace and the protection of human rights had made it possible to alleviate the devastating effects of such evils. That was why UNHCR's presence in those areas was extremely important. Where the mental health of refugees was concerned, it would be advisable for UNHCR to appoint staff who were qualified in that field, as already recommended by his delegation.

26. Thanks to the "Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a los Refugiados" (COMAR), Mexico was providing for 44,011 Guatemalan refugees and was also dealing with individual cases of urban refugees from Guatemala, El Salvador and other countries.

27. With a view to enabling the refugee population to achieve self-sufficiency as quickly as possible, Mexico was giving effect in the States of Campeche and Quintana Roo to the Multi-year Plan prepared in 1989 in the context of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA).

28. For the past two years, Mexico had also been implementing programmes linking humanitarian action with environmental protection. From 1990 to 30 June 1992, 2,018 hectares had thus been reafforested in the State of Chiapas and there were plans to reafforest a further 1,400 hectares between 1992 and 1993. Mexico would also be continuing the rehabilitation of the Montebello Lakes National Park. Those efforts had helped to make the refugee population more environmentally aware and to preserve two species of trees which were in danger of becoming extinct in the region.

29. In the belief that voluntary repatriation was the ideal solution to the refugee problem, Mexico had allowed the final return of a very large number of Guatemalans in 1992. In addition, all the modalities of refugee return would be covered by an agreement to be signed on 8 October 1992 in Guatemala City by the Permanent Commissions of Guatemalan Refugees and the Guatemalan Government. In that regard, the Government of Mexico wished to state that it had at all times provided the parties concerned with the necessary facilities to enable them to meet at a place of their choice and that it had taken care to ensure that the terms of that essential agreement were in the interests of the population concerned and of the country of origin.

30. The return of Salvadorian refugees would also take place in 1992. Following the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords on 16 January 1992, the "Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a los Refugiados" (COMAR), of which he was general coordinator, had held talks with various Salvadorians, the Office for Refugee Coordination in Central America and the Salvadorian authorities with a view to defining the modalities for repatriation in conditions of security and dignity.

31. In cooperation with several non-governmental organizations, Mexico was dealing with a number of aspects of refugee protection, especially in the fields of health, education, nutrition and the welfare of women.

32. The peace process in Central America had laid the foundations for one of the refugee conferences that had had the greatest success not only because, for the first time, those involved had been invited to participate, but also because it had produced a plan of action and a follow-up mechanism. Mexico, which had taken part in all the preparatory work for the conference, was faithfully implementing that plan of action.

33. As a dynamic process for finding solutions to the problems of refugees in Central America, Belize and Mexico, CIREFCA had given the countries of the region an opportunity to improve their legislation covering refugees and repatriated persons. Regulations giving effect to the General Population Act, which governed eligibility for refugee status would thus come into force on 1 October 1992. Other steps had been taken by his country to assist refugees, especially in the fields of health, education, employment, economic and social rights and the preservation of their cultural identity.

34. In addition, Mexico had always respected refugee organizations and had invited them to participate in all projects designed to promote their dignity and well-being. It had thus invited refugee representatives to the Second International Meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-Up Committee. Mexico's asylum policy had, in turn, led to the enrichment of the national economy and culture.

35. In conclusion, he thanked the international community for the efforts it was making to solve the refugee problem in Mexico.

36. Mr. SIR EL KHATIM (Sudan) said that his country, which had common borders with eight other African countries, had a refugee population of over 1 million which placed a heavy burden on its economy, environment, infrastructure and essential services such as education, health care and public transport. Despite those difficulties, Sudan remained true to its belief, which was rooted in its civilization, religion and traditions, that assistance should be given to those afflicted by misfortune.

37. Sudan continued to cooperate with UNHCR in protection and assistance activities on behalf of refugees until such time as conditions were right for voluntary repatriation. However, the hopes that had been raised in 1991 within the High Commissioner's Office, among the international community and among refugees themselves that 1992 would mark the voluntary repatriation of Eritrean refugees in Sudan had been disappointed. The year was drawing to a close and matters did not seem to be moving in that direction. In addition, the talks between the Eritrean authorities and UNHCR on the modalities of such repatriation had reached a stalemate. In his view, that situation was due to the wide gap that existed between conditions for voluntary repatriation and conditions for the reintegration of the Eritrean refugees. The situation in Eritrea called for a comprehensive approach, since it was the result of a war which had destroyed the very heart of that territory. It also provided an opportunity for expanding UNHCR's mandate, without prejudging the role of the specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations, and called for the redoubling of efforts to assist organizations working in the field.

38. The Eritrean refugees should continue to benefit from the programme of assistance and protection and Sudan emphasized the need for all parties concerned to cooperate with a view to overcoming the obstacles to voluntary repatriation. It also stressed that UNHCR and the international community should continue to provide for such refugees.

39. Sudan had made considerable efforts in the economic sphere. However, budgetary allocations were constantly declining, without taking account of inflation, and certain programmes had been frozen without notice. As a result, services for refugees had deteriorated both in quality and quantity and there was constant suffering in the refuge areas. In order to guard against the dangers of that situation, Sudan was requesting that funds earmarked for the programme for Sudan should be reviewed.

40. His delegation agreed with some of the ideas put forward by the High Commissioner in her introductory statement. It thus believed that voluntary repatriation operations should be linked to quick-impact development projects; that UNHCR's mandate should be extended to enable it, jointly with other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, to tackle the problems of refugees, returnees and the affected population on a comprehensive basis; and that the role of UNHCR should be strengthened in connection with the protection of the environment in camp areas.

41. Sudan, for its part, would honour its commitments towards the refugees, but it was important that the international community should play its proper role in furthering that humanitarian cause. In that regard, he welcomed the cooperation of the Governments of Chad and Uganda. He also urged that the rules of justice and equity should be applied to all refugees on their return to their country. On that basis, Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries should enjoy UNHCR protection comparable to that provided for refugees in Sudan. The international community should also give particular attention to the needs of refugee children, now that UNHCR had appointed a coordinator for refugee children. It was important that any action on behalf of refugees should be free of political connotations.

42. Sudan commended the efforts made by UNHCR officials and other international officials working in humanitarian fields and would spare no effort to facilitate their task. In that regard, it deplored and condemned the unfortunate accident which had cost two UNHCR staff members their lives. The Government of Sudan would continue to work towards establishing peace in Africa and towards guaranteeing the security both of its citizens and of international officials.

43. The tragedy of the Somali people, which was truly the tragedy of the century, was deeply distressing. There was no doubt that the responsibility of the international community towards them required a massive and effective mobilization of efforts to help them break the vicious circle of suffering.

44. Lastly, in line with the conclusions of the Summit Meeting held in Addis Ababa in April 1992, he called for the organization, in cooperation

with UNHCR, the Organization of African Unity and the governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned, of a special international conference on refugees in the Horn of Africa. His Government would be ready to host such a conference or to take part in organizing it in some capital city in the region.

45. Mr. RAHMAN (Observer for Bangladesh) said that the visit which Mr. de Riedmatten, the Chairman of the last session of the Executive Committee, had made to Bangladesh had shown that close attention was being paid to the complex situation of Myanmar refugees in Bangladesh and he thanked the speakers who had referred to the problem and expressed appreciation for his Government's efforts. He drew attention to the text of the statement by the Relief Minister of Bangladesh which had been circulated to all members of the Executive Committee and dealt with relief and other operational aspects of the refugee situation in the country.

46. Bangladesh was now hosting 265,000 refugees from Myanmar who were housed in 23 camps, although 48,000 were still without shelter. The area where they were settled was densely populated and already impoverished by the devastating cyclone of May 1991 and, as a result, there had been enormous problems in clearing woodland and in providing water supplies, health care and sanitation. Environmental damage was increasing. There was also mounting tension with local communities as a result of competition for scarce jobs, prostitution, the sale of relief supplies, crime, etc.

47. In such circumstances, the Government was subject to enormous pressures. It was not possible to set dates for a repatriation operation which would take at least six months, even if all conditions were fulfilled. The Government thus had to decide whether to continue to build shelters, how to avoid clashes with local communities, how to meet the costs involved, given the poverty of the country, and how much longer it could depend on the international community. The refugees themselves felt no sense or urgency, since they had found a relatively safe haven and were enjoying at least minimal living conditions.

48. The Government of Bangladesh was encouraging the refugees to return voluntarily, but, even in that connection, there was the question of how the concept of "voluntary return" was to be defined. Moreover, who was to decide - the Government, UNHCR, the international community or the refugees themselves? Those questions were complicated by the existence of pressure groups and selfishly motivated political activists. In addition, it was well known that Myanmar refugees were fearful of the idea of returning to their country. It was unfortunate that a group of 49 refugees had returned home without any consultation or involvement on the part of UNHCR, whereas a joint statement by Myanmar and Bangladesh, dated 28 April 1992, had stipulated that UNHCR must be involved in any return operation. UNHCR should be involved at least in order to ascertain whether such returns were indeed voluntary.

49. Concern had been expressed following demonstrations in the camps in which some persons had been killed and others wounded. Reference had also been made

to shooting incidents and to the detention of some refugees. His Government was facing up frankly to such difficulties, which reflected the ambiguous and complex situation he had described. He emphasized that Bangladesh had not sought to close its doors to refugees, but was, rather, concerned about the criteria that would govern their return. If Myanmar refused to allow the presence of UNHCR and the United Nations in general, were the refugees destined to remain indefinitely on Bangladesh soil? In fact, voluntary repatriation was dependent on the political situation in Myanmar and on the extent to which human rights were respected in that country.

50. He also deplored the fact that UNHCR had made certain criticisms of his Government and had sometimes given the impression that it supported the demonstrations. If the Government of Bangladesh had intervened, it had been in order to counter the activities of a well-organized minority of political dissidents, holders of vested interests, and criminal elements. The Government had spared no effort to ensure the return of refugees in dignity and safety and its good faith in that regard could not be doubted. In addition, it highly appreciated UNHCR's commitment and endeavoured to support it to the fullest extent possible. Bangladesh had argued in favour of adoption of a tripartite agreement, but Myanmar had strongly opposed it. All that could now be done was to pursue negotiations with the Myanmar authorities and to mobilize the support of the international community.

51. Bangladesh reaffirmed that it had tried all kinds of incentives to encourage the refugees to return home voluntarily, as representatives of States and non-governmental organizations, the media and human rights activists had been able to see for themselves. Unfortunately, Myanmar appeared to be intractable as far as UNHCR was concerned, whereas it had agreed, though with reluctance, to allow other United Nations agencies, such as UNDP and UNICEF, to take up a presence in its territory. However, it had already agreed to discuss certain issues; to enable further progress to be made, Bangladesh appealed to the good offices of countries which had the most influence on Myanmar; China and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) had made great efforts to persuade Myanmar to accept an impartial United Nations presence, UNHCR's continuing support was crucial to ensure the continuation of international assistance to an operation which was clearly going to be a long-term process. In addition, UNHCR could facilitate other forms of United Nations presence, especially that of UNDP to assist with resettlement activities.

52. Mr. KAMENCU (Observer for Kenya) said that it was unfortunate that the end of the cold war which should have signalled a new era of hope had ironically brought new problems to the fore that had resulted in 17 million refugees and displaced persons in the world today. In Africa, the problem of refugees was creating insecurity, adversely affecting economies and threatening the environment.

53. The situation in the Horn of Africa was the most desperate the world had seen since the Second World War. The people of Somalia were suffering from drought, civil war and economic, social and political collapse which had

driven over 1 million people to flee to neighbouring countries. Many of those refugees were afflicted by malnutrition and dehydration, if not starvation; in some camps, the death toll was 40 persons per day. Despite the response of the Kenyan Government, UNHCR and other United Nations agencies, much remained to be done to satisfy basic needs.

54. The plight of refugees and displaced persons in southern Africa, particularly in Malawi, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia, was equally disturbing. The Kenyan Government had been deeply involved in the search for peace in that region and noted with satisfaction that a peace accord had been reached in Mozambique, while elections were taking place in Angola.

55. Kenya was providing shelter for about 600,000 refugees and asylum seekers, 408,000 of whom had been registered and placed in camps. Most of them were Somalis, but there were also Ethiopian, Sudanese, Burundi and other refugees from neighbouring countries. The large influx of refugees had had a dramatic impact on Kenya's social and economic life and had reduced its capacity to cater effectively for the needs of its own nationals. Inflation had soared and food reserves had been depleted. Insecurity had caused losses of life and property losses had been considerable.

56. In order to deal with that influx, which was continuing at the rate of 1,000 persons per day, the Kenyan Government had set up a national refugee programme coordinating committee to coordinate all refugee operations, implement the Government's refugee policy and execute the programmes funded by foreign donors and local agencies. Kenya intended to continue assisting the refugees, but, in order to do so, it was looking to the international community for sufficient resources. To that end, he expected that UNHCR's budget allocation for Africa would be considerably increased. The Kenyan Government fully supported the new cross-mandate programme announced by the High Commissioner, but stressed that it should be harmonized with national development projects. He hoped that additional information would be provided about the implementation of that programme before the end of the session.

57. In collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Kenyan Government had facilitated the cross-border feeding programmes for Ethiopia and Somalia and it was through the High Commissioner's good offices that those programmes had produced good results. However, it was important to go further and establish feeding enclaves in Africa within the countries of conflict, as had been done in Iraq; such enclaves would, for example, prevent the displaced persons from having to cross into other countries for assistance.

58. As a demonstration of Kenya's goodwill, the President of Kenya, Mr. Arap Moi, had spearheaded a number of initiatives to bring peace to the Horn of Africa. He had participated actively in the Horn of Africa summit on humanitarian issues held in Addis Ababa in April 1992. However, Kenya was affected by drought and the unstable world economy and it needed the international community to provide not only food aid, but also the resources necessary for administrative support services, water resources development, health services, range management, educational support and infrastructural improvement, the cost of which had been estimated at some US$ 213 million.

59. He thanked all those who had provided support for the refugees in Kenya and, in particular, non-governmental organizations such as the African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Kenya Red Cross, CARE, OXFAM, Médecins sans Frontières - Belgium and France, the Muslim Foundation, Americares, Catholic Relief Services and religious organizations in Kenya. He also thanked the Governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland and all members of the EEC.

60. Referring specifically to the assistance provided by the Government of Japan, he said that the people and Government of Japan had consistently helped Kenya's refugee and other development programmes through a bilateral understanding and he hoped that that assistance would continue at the same level. Lastly, he thanked the other Governments which were represented at the current session and which had provided assistance for the Kenyan refugee programme in one way or another. He also expressed his appreciation to UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF and UNDP and all the other United Nations agencies, as well as to the Working Group on Solutions and Protection.

61. Mr. OULD HOUMEID (Observer for Mauritania) said that, because of the diversity of the groups which made up its population and despite its poverty, his country had a tradition of tolerance and of welcoming strangers. It was currently giving shelter to 50,000 Malians, 30,000 of whom were assisted by UNHCR. It was a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and to the 1969 OAU Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa and applied their provisions and cooperated with UNHCR for that purpose. However, it regarded asylum only as a necessary step towards the restoration of social equilibria guaranteeing civil peace.

62. To assist the Malian refugees, Mauritania had cooperated with UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) in order to meet their food needs, provide them with the necessary shelter and offer them health care and water supplies. Those efforts had been sustained by non-governmental organizations such as Médecins sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde, OXFAM, World Vision International and Equilibre. In 1992, that praiseworthy commitment had cost the life of one volunteer from Médecins du Monde and another from Equilibre, for which the Government of Mauritania offered its sympathy.

63. He thanked UNHCR for its assistance to the 30,000 Malians who had been taken in in eastern Mauritania and, through UNHCR, he thanked the international community for the assistance it had provided since June 1991. In 1992, UNHCR had been able to allocate about $4.2 million to that operation. Today, it could be said that the objective had been achieved and that the Malians Mauritania had taken in were living in conditions comparable to those enjoyed by Mauritanians. The level of assistance should nevertheless be maintained in 1993, with a view to preparing for voluntary repatriation.

64. However, the presence of the refugee population had had adverse effects on the environment: for example, wood was systematically collected for

cooking, springs had been depleted because of the cattle the Malian herdsmen had brought with them, transborder trade in essential goods had dried up and there was the sight of dozens of trucks with foodstuffs passing through villages where the local population sometimes faced shortages etc. Support measures should be taken to mitigate the harsh living conditions of the local population, to strengthen the carrying capacity of the environment and to promote trade in the region.

65. Mr. WAISS (Observer for Djibouti) said that, in the past few months, Djibouti had once again taken in a large number of displaced persons and refugees from Somalia. However, many of them were fleeing from the settlement camps where accommodation had been provided for them in the interior of the country and were flooding into the capital, where they were reduced to begging and living in the streets and public places. The social and economic infrastructure, which was showing the effects of the constant wars in the region, remained precarious and could not cope adequately with that phenomenon. Health problems were already being faced in several districts of the capital; deliquency and insecurity were increasing noticeably and the decline in moral standards was becoming more pronounced. Facilities in the camps needed to be strengthened and improved and the registration and transfer of refugees living in the capital needed to be organized.

66. Furthermore, the drought that was hitting the entire region so hard had not spared Djibouti. The assistance given to the country should take that new factor into account and focus not only on the refugees from neighbouring countries but also on the local population which had been offering them hospitality for a long time.

67. In so far as possible, Djibouti was willing to help persons in distress who were fleeing from bloody fighting in their countries to seek refuge on its soil. It also hoped that the international community would continue to support it in that endeavour until those refugees and displaced persons could return to their countries. It was willing to provide every facility for the transport of foodstuffs and for relief assistance to Ethiopia and Somalia.

68. He praised the sustained efforts UNHCR was making throughout the world to bring relief and protection to millions of human beings who were the victims of war and persecution and who were fleeing their countries. He also thanked the staff of UNHCR and the international organizations who were working in the field under difficult conditions to assist those persons. Lastly, he supported the efforts being made to mobilize the international community to assist Somalia and noted that, in view of the magnitude of the problems to be overcome, a great deal still remained to be done along those lines.

69. Mr. NGUYEN LUONG (Observer for Viet Nam), referring to the problem of the boat people, said he welcomed the fact that the issue had been depoliticized, thus enabling all the countries involved to discuss it from the purely humanitarian point of view, as it should be, since human beings were involved. The Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees which had been adopted by the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees was part of

that approach and had yielded results: the number of illegal departures had declined dramatically from 73,399 in 1989 to 1,752 in late September 1992. The Orderly Departure Programme was working well: over 255,000 persons had left the country between 1989 and the end of September 1992, whereas another 100,000 who had already been issued exit visas, were awaiting the completion of immigration procedures in a resettlement country. Voluntary repatriation had speeded up, since the number of persons who had returned to Viet Nam of their own free will had increased from 916 in 1989 to 11,354 in late September 1992; altogether, 29,509 persons had thus been reintegrated into their communities of origin.

70. With the expanded mandate that it had been given by the United Nations Secretary-General, UNHCR had played an important role in that regard, whether in the mobilization of international financial assistance, in the coordination and organization of voluntary repatriation or in the follow-up of the reintegration agreements. He thanked the High Commissioner and all her colleagues who had contributed to that vast undertaking, as well as all the countries and organizations which had helped to implement the Plan of Action. Viet Nam was also deeply appreciative of the assistance it had received from the European Community in reintegrating the returnees. It would continue to cooperate with the United Kingdom and Hong Kong in regularizing, through voluntary repatriation, the situation of those asylum-seekers whose requests had been denied and was prepared to consider similar arrangements with other countries of first asylum.

71. He nevertheless noted that political will was not enough to reintegrate tens of thousands of persons. The wherewithal to do so was also necessary and, while Viet Nam was endeavouring to expand its capacity for absorbing the returnees by improving its economic performance, it had to be able to count on stronger and broader international cooperation. Accordingly, it supported the idea of combining development aid with humanitarian assistance.

72. Ms. HARUOJA (Observer for Estonia) said that Estonia, which had, in the past played the role of a bridge between Russia and western Europe, had become a transit country for persons from the Community of Independent States and other countries who were seeking refuge elsewhere, mainly in western Europe. At present, Estonia had refugees from Abkhazia in Georgia who had fled the armed conflicts there.

73. Estonia was always willing to cooperate with the United Nations in assisting refugees, despite its modest means, since it was a small country of 1.5 million, and the vital tasks it had to tackle, especially the strengthening of its newly regained independence and its security, as well as the development of its economy and democratic institutions.

74. Estonia was not one of those countries which, out of revenge for a painful past, sparked refugee movements by invoking ethnic considerations. However, following the mass deportations of Estonians which had begun in 1940 and the assimilation and settlement policies pursued by the Soviet regime, ethnic Estonians, who had made up 88.8 per cent of the country's population

before the Soviet occupation, now accounted for only about 60 per cent. None the less, Estonia allowed its non-ethnic residents full freedom to apply for citizenship of Estonia, Russia or any other country. The new democratic Constitution provided for all the relevant legal guarantees and the new law of citizenship established an expeditious naturalization procedure for those who had settled in Estonia under the Soviet occupation. However, allegations of human rights violations had been made in that regard and the Estonian authorities had therefore invited a mission from the CSCE Office in Warsaw to investigate allegations of human rights violations in Estonia. There were even persons, not in the Executive Committee of UNHCR, but elsewhere on the international scene, who were calling for automatic Estonian citizenship for Russian citizens who fell into that category, as if Russia had had historic and geopolitical rights over Estonia. The Estonian Government was demanding that such interference by Russia in Estonia's internal affairs should cease.

75. She expressed her deep appreciation to UNHCR for the extremely important work it was doing.

76. Mr. EL KHAZEN (Lebanon) said that, in the past, his country had contributed a great deal to the international community and could be useful to it again one day if the latter consistently supported it through the trials it was still enduring. Because of the war, thousands of Lebanese had been forced to flee their homes and villages and seek refuge elsewhere in Lebanon or in other countries. They had been followed by hundreds of families who could no longer live in safety in the areas of southern Lebanon that were occupied by Israel and continuously shelled by the Israeli army.

77. Those persons were not covered by the 1951 Convention, even though they were beset by the same problems as persons recognized as refugees by the Convention and were greatly in need of UNHCR's help and protection. The Lebanese authorities were grateful for what UNHCR had done to assist Lebanon in recent years, but nevertheless considered that a redefinition of the notion of refugee was urgently needed. The report by the High Commissioner on refugees in their own country confirmed their view. Of course, assistance to such persons should not be the sole responsibility of UNHCR, but should be shared by several United Nations agencies.

78. Lebanon strongly supported UNHCR's efforts to assist refugees throughout the world and considered that its financial resources should be such as to meet the needs of those refugees, whose numbers were still increasing.

79. It could not be denied that, in most cases, refugee movements were the result of special policies and inequity in relations between States. The number of refugees could not be reduced unless all countries respected the principles of international law and, in particular, those relating to the peaceful settlement of disputes, the non-use of force in international relations, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and the right of peoples to self-determination. In that connection, respect for human rights and efforts to combat poverty in developing countries through an increase in development projects would also be essential. Above all, there

had to be peace. He therefore appealed to all States represented at the current session to work to strengthen peace and cooperate to eliminate all threats to it.

80. Mr. ARTEAGA (Venezuela) said that the six points raised by the High Commissioner in her introductory statement, namely, prevention, emergency preparedness, protection, the search for solutions, international solidarity and an adequate flow of resources, clearly showed how formidable refugee problems were and, at the same time, indicated the course to be followed in order to solve those problems. He shared Mrs. Ogata's view that it was through political initiatives that the deep-seated causes of internal and cross-border displacements could be eradicated and through political agreements that durable solutions could be found to such displacements. Close coordination between political bodies and humanitarian agencies was thus necessary so that full account might be taken of the possibilities for and limits to humanitarian action.

81. The Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/799) should be considered from that point of view. It attested to the efforts UNHCR was making to identify the solutions required by new situations and showed that current problems could be solved on the basis of the fundamental principles embodied in the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol and other existing instruments. He agreed in principle with the innovative solutions proposed in the Note in order to build protection firmly into the three areas of UNHCR's work, which were emergency preparedness and response, voluntary repatriation and solutions. The suggestions of the Working Group set up by the High Commissioner were akin to those made by the Working Group of the Executive Committee and appeared to draw their inspiration from the programmes which had resulted from the International Conference on Central American refugees and were being applied successfully in that part of the world. Venezuela had always maintained that such an overall concept of the problem of refugees was the most appropriate.

82. It was unfortunate that the Progress Report on Implementation of the UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women (EC/SCP/74) had been submitted for consideration to the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection instead of to the Executive Committee, as an annex to the above-mentioned Note; it deserved to be given such importance because it dealt with the international protection of a large proportion of the refugee population. Definite progress had obviously been made in that regard. The fact that the Guidelines were being applied to all of UNHCR's protection and assistance activities had certainly made it possible to increase the Office's associates' awareness of the problem. That probably explained why there was now better statistical information on the demographic composition of the refugee population and also why the practical problems posed by the physical safety of refugee women had been assessed frankly in the document under consideration, which also dealt with the problems of access by refugee women to both services and assistance and indicated the serious effects on refugee women of the non-recognition by legal texts of their refugee status. The measures recommended initially to solve the problems facing the refugee women appeared useful, but, once again, it was by applying the Guidelines to all of UNHCR's activities that noticeable progress could be made.

83. With regard to the Information Note on Refugee Children (E/SC.2/54), he welcomed the fact that a Senior Coordinator for Refugee Children had been appointed through the generosity of the Norwegian Government and supported the idea that the Senior Coordinator's task should be to make the needs of refugee children an integral part of UNHCR's activities. It was in that spirit that Venezuela had supported the request made to UNHCR by the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection that all matters concerning the protection of refugees, men, women and children, should be submitted for consideration by that body, in order to avoid duplication of the work of the two Sub-Committees.

84. He assured Mrs. Ogata that his Government supported her in the fulfilment of her mandate, which she was performing so competently, intelligently and sensitively.

85. Mr. BEBLER (Observer for Slovenia) said that, since autumn, his country had received well over 120,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia and that the number of refugees in the country today was close to 100,000. The burden of the refugees had become excessive for such a small country, even though it had been spared the suffering and destruction that Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia had experienced. Slovenia was grateful to the humanitarian organizations and the donor countries which had given it assistance to that end, but that aid was far from meeting the refugees' actual needs. The expenses that Slovenia had had to incur had been such that it could no longer provide decent shelter and comfort for new refugees. Furthermore, Serbian aircraft and artillery continued to bomb inhabited areas, whereas the "ethnic cleansing" operations were still being carried out in Bosnia with military and financial support from Belgrade, so that there was likely to be another wave of refugees that could well reach 1 million persons.

86. It was high time for the international community to comprehend the magnitude of the problem and strive resolutely to establish peace or indeed impose it, while at the same time greatly increasing humanitarian assistance. Failing that, that part of the European continent ran the risk of having to face a problem similar in some respects to the Palestinian problem, with all the attendant implications.

87. Slovenia fully supported the efforts made by UNHCR to find new solutions to the refugee problems throughout the world, including the Balkan area.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.